

Fightback March 2014

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

**Palestine solidarity:
pride in resistance,
not in apartheid"**

**Mainstream racism
& white power groups**

**Venezuela:
The right wing on
the streets**

**Film review:
The Hunger Games
Catching Fire**

**The Internet Party:
A progressive force?**

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Fightback magazine is now in its 20th year as we continue the long-term fight for socialism. Readers and supporters may consider remembering us in their will with assets or money that will help the struggle in the long-term. If this is you please put in your will 'Fightback, PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland' as well as what you would like to leave to us.

About Fightback

Under our current system, democracy consists of a vote every 3 years. Most of our lives are lived under dictatorship, the dictatorship of bosses and WINZ case managers. Fightback stands for a system in which our workplaces, our schools, our universities are run democratically, for social need rather than private profit.

Fightback participates in the MANA Movement, whose stated mission is to bring “rangatiratanga to the poor, the powerless and the dispossessed.” Capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa through colonisation, and the fight for indigenous self-determination is intimately connected with the fight for an egalitarian society. We also maintain an independent Marxist organisation outside of parliament, to offer a vision of a world beyond the parliamentary capitalist system.

Fightback stands against all forms of oppression. We believe working-class power, the struggle of the majority for self-determination, is the basis for ending all forms of oppression. However, we also recognise that daily inequities such as sexism must be addressed here and now, not just after the revolution.

Fightback is embedded in a range of struggles on the ground; including building a fighting trade union movement, movements for gender and sexual liberation, and anti-racism.

Fightback also publishes a monthly magazine, and a website, to offer a socialist perspective on ongoing struggles.

Fightback stands for struggle, solidarity and socialism.

Editorial

Welcome to the March 2014 edition of Fightback, monthly magazine of Fightback (Aotearoa/NZ). Fightback stands for struggle, solidarity and socialism.

We are internationalists; we realise that liberation in any one country depends on global liberation. A round-up of global struggles can be found on P6-7.

While many are inspired by the apparent flowering of street movements since 2011, street movements are not always progressive. In Venezuela, counter-revolutionary forces have clashed with forces seeking to extend the Bolivarian revolution. From P8-14, Bronwen Beechey covers the “right-wing on the streets” in Venezuela.

Internationalism means loosening the grip of imperialism, the domination of a global majority by a global elite. Fightback endorses the call for Boycotts, Divestments and Sanctions (BDS) on Israel, a bastion of Western imperialist power in the Middle East. We cover struggles in Aotearoa/NZ to cut ties with Israel on P14-15.

Racism, and the struggle for national liberation, isn't just something that happens overseas. The struggle for Maori and Pacific self-determination, and against racism, is ongoing in Aotearoa/NZ. From

23-24, Ian Anderson discusses the relationship between mainstream racism and white power groups.

Class struggle generally is also not just something that happens in far-flung regions, like Latin America and Eastern Europe. In an article reprinted from the Daily Blog, Unite Union General Secretary Mike Treen covers the war by the capitalist class on unemployed workers (P19-20). Ciaran Doolin unearths part of the history of resistance in Aotearoa/NZ; the story of Harriet Morison and the tailoresses' union (P20-22).

Fightback is a small organisation operating on voluntary labour. If you like what you see and want to support our work, get a subscription to the paper. A basic subscription costs \$20 for a year, while a sustaining subscription costs \$10 a month.

Fightback
Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

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Obituary

Obituary: Mike Kyriazopoulos

Last month Fightback lost one of its leading members, Michael Kyriazopoulos. In Aotearoa he was known in the workers movement as Mike Kay. Mike came to us from England but he had a strong Greek heritage, and had close family living in both Israel and South Africa. So he had a very broad culture. Tragically, he was diagnosed with motor neurone disease in January 2013.

He brought a lot to Fightback. His international knowledge, his knowledge of issues within Marxism, and his measured, consistent approach to practice meant that he was a leading member of the organisation. At Mike's funeral a tribute by one of Mike's Alliance for Workers Liberty comrades in the UK was read. It pointed out that Mike was 'comfortable leading from the middle'. This was a great way to put it; in our view Mike led really well but he never sought to be out at the front and never got in the way of the political growth of others who he developed.

His industrial work in the UK was in the rank-and-file of the posties union. In Aotearoa he worked as an organiser for Northern AWUNZ. His finest moment was during the struggle of I-Kiribati workers against redundancies and to establish union rights with an agricultural employer. He turned this in to a political struggle by involving his local Mana Party branch and Mana leaders. In that struggle he also led a case for reinstatement and was successful. This had lasting importance in terms of case law, as the government had recently changed reinstatement laws, so they were up for interpretation. At a different workplace, a discussion has just been started about a members' education scholarship being made under his name. Of course he supported workers in many other struggles being waged by other unions.

Theoretically Mike's main contributions

were on the issue of the relationship between Maori liberation and socialism. He asked us all, particularly in the Mana movement and in the socialist left, to keep pushing on this question. Fightback has endorsed the idea of compiling some of his work on these issues into pamphlet form. Some people are surprised that this was an area where Mike focussed a lot of his theoretical work. But it makes sense. He was able to come at the question with less pre-termination than others, and with the sharp clarity for which he was known.

Mike and his wife Jo became citizens of Aotearoa in the first half of 2013 and Mike swore his citizenship oath in the presence of Hone Harawira. Mike rebelliously followed that with a commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi. Hone threw one of his tongue-in-cheek

jokes by noting "and he'll be one of the first people we've welcomed in to the country!"

Amongst all his friends – activists and non-activists – Mike was also inspirational because of the way he was during his illness and because of his accomplishments when he was sick. This included continuing to pay socialist membership dues, writing and publishing his grandmother's memoirs of the Russian revolution, and of course publishing his fiction piece *A Cloudy Sunday*. We thank him for leaving us with *A Cloudy Sunday* which provides many insights into his views and thoughts on life.

We will miss him dearly as a comrade. Many of us will also miss him as a friend. We'll never forget him, his contribution, or the work he has asked us to continue.



Mike at an 'Aotearoa Not For Sale' rally.



Interview: Ben Peterson (Australian socialist)

Ben Peterson is an Australian socialist who recently moved to Aotearoa/NZ, joining Fightback and Unite. Fightback writer Ian Anderson asked Ben a few questions about socialism, trade union work, and his experiences on both sides of the Tasman.

FB: How did you become a socialist?

BP: I think that's an interesting question. There's certain values that I've had that as long as I can remember, I've always hated injustice, and I think I've always had empathy for other people,

especially those that are struggling. When I was in high school I was increasingly frustrated with inequality, war and all the bullshit in the world.

When I came across socialist politics it gave me a means to understand the world, and a vehicle to fight for something different. I didn't so much become something new, as I gave vent to feelings I think I'd always had. And since then I've been trying to do my bit organizing against injustice and environmental destruction.

FB: In Australia you were active in

Resistance, and Socialist Alliance. Can you talk about this work?

BP: I came across Resistance (a socialist youth organization) and Socialist Alliance in 2006 when I was in high school, and I've been involved since then. Since 2009 I was heavily involved in local and national leadership bodies and was involved in branches in Geelong, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney, Hobart and Adelaide.

The Socialist Alliance project is an ambitious one. It has union interventions, elected local councillors, student clubs and more. I've been involved in so

Fightback/International

many campaigns, it's hard to succinctly describe what we do, but I can say that I've learnt that socialism can be relevant and that we can build an organisation and have an impact, even from our small and isolated beginnings.

FB: In Australia last year, your organisation Socialist Alliance began a unity process with Socialist Alternative. This process, involving the two largest revolutionary socialist organisations in the country, was terminated. What's your view of this process and its lessons?

BP: I think one of the objective challenges for the left groups today is to find ways to overcome the stratification and isolation of the Marxist left. This is true for both Australia and Aotearoa, and in places around the world. So I think it was an overwhelmingly positive thing that these talks happened, and it is a setback that they were not able, at this point, to go any further

That being said, I don't think the process collapsed over nothing. Unity cannot happen just because we want it to, it's going to take time to thrash out a way forward for the left, and to build the organisation that can make it happen. For now, there are real differences between the groups in Australia around what is possible for socialists today, and how to build our organisations. But the greater dialogue between groups can only be a

good thing.

FB: You've taken a job for Unite in Aotearoa/NZ. What is the value of working in Unite, in your view?

BP: I'm excited to be a part of Unite because I think that Unite is an interesting political project.

I don't think that for socialists, working for a union is in and of itself something progressive, but I think Unite has real space to be involved with important campaigns. I think the campaigns that Unite has been involved in like the \$15 dollar minimum wage campaign have been real political interventions, that have improved the lot of the working class, and that's exciting.

I also see the links between the Unite project, and things like the Mana movement. A radical political party based in indigenous people and progressives - that just does not exist in Australia. I think having these sorts of organisations opens opportunities for working people to fight back, I'm just interested in contributing to these that and learning more.

FB: Why do you think socialists should support trade unions in general?

BP: Well, unions are organizations of workers. Socialists support workers being organised and fighting to better

themselves, unions are a part of this. That being said, we as socialists support unions - not necessarily union leaderships. We need to contest for ideas in unions, because in most circumstances union leaderships are captured by people who at best have no vision for systematic change built on people power, and at worst are just interested in protecting their privileged positions. A socialist approach to unions, in my opinion, is one of supporting building a political and organizational current in the unions that can help lead a fight-back.

FB: Why did you join Fightback?

BP: As an activist, I know that I get more out of myself when I'm working with others. As a socialist, I know that our power as working class people can only come collectively - we are never gonna have the millions to buy our way out of capitalism. Organisation is important so we can confront the problems we face today and overcome them. I've joined Fightback for those reasons. I have known comrades in Fightback for some time, and I know they are serious comrades who want to lead the resistance to capitalism. It's an organisation with a range of experiences that I look forward to learning from, and I feel that Fightback is a place I can contribute to.

Global round-up

Round-up of recent global struggles by Daphne Lawless, Fightback (Auckland).

Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) formerly a part of Yugoslavia, has seen massive anti-government workers' protests.

A protest by unemployed workers in the

town of Tuzla against privatisation of local factories ended up with the town's government building on fire and police using water cannon against protestors in Sarajevo, B&H's capital. Workers in Tuzla also demanded defence of their pensions, and arrests of those who have corruptly benefited from privatisation. Since the end of the Yugoslavian wars in 1995, B&H has been split into a Serb state and a Croat/Muslim state

who share the national government between them. Their constant squabbling causes permanent government deadlock, leaving real power in the hands of the United Nations High Representative, who acts as a tool of NATO, the European Union and the IMF.

The uprising in Tuzla raised slogans not only against privatisation, but against "nationalism" - which, in B&H, means the two ethnic states stirring up hatred

against each other while neglecting the real problems of working people. One miner in Tuzla told the crowd: “The only identity we have is as miners”. “We are hungry in three languages” explained a banner on a demonstration in the town of Zenica.

Workers’ protests have often been the beginning of regime change in this region – for example, the 2000 uprising against the Serbian nationalist war-monger Slobodan Milosevic was sparked by a coal miners’ protest.

Meanwhile, anti-government protests in Ukraine have turned deadly.

More than 60 deaths are reported after police stormed a protest camp in the capital, Kiev.

Ukraine’s politics have been divided for years between pro-Russian and pro-European factions. The latest protests broke out after President Viktor Yanukovich unexpectedly cancelled a deal with the EU to make one with Russia instead.

Many of the protesters are legitimately opposed to their government’s embrace of the autocratic Putin regime. But others are linked with the neo-fascist Svoboda party, who attack Russian-speakers and anarchists. And working people in Greece or Spain would be quick to tell Ukrainian protesters that the EU is no defender of human rights or democracy.

Venezuela has also seen violent protests, this time by the right-wing opposition against the socialist government of President Nicolás Maduro.

Two deaths were reported after a commemorative demonstration turned into attacks on government buildings, police cars and pro-government TV stations. The opposition blames Maduro and his

United Socialist Party (PSUV), founded by the late president Hugo Chávez, for rising crime and high inflation. The government, in turn, blames price rises on businesses deliberately hoarding food to sabotage the economy and increase opposition support.

It’s thought that the violent protests may indicate a split in the opposition, between moderate forces who wish to fight the PSUV within the current constitution, and a far-right or even fascist tendency who want to provoke a coup. PSUV leaders have called on workers and students not to fall for right-wing provocations.

France sent troops into its former colony, the Central African Republic (CAR) in January to reinforce its government.

The CAR is one of the world’s poorest countries, even though it sits on large reserves of diamonds, oil and uranium. It has been ruled by a series of military dictators since 1966, all of which have been supported by France.

French troops were already involved in the neighbouring country of Mali, fighting an Islamic separatist movement in the north of that country. In the background of all of this is China’s increasing economic influence over former Western allies in Africa.

The CAR had no problem with ethnic or religious conflict in the past. But 2003 coup leader François Bozizé led persecutions of the Muslim minority. After he was overthrown by the mainly Muslim Seleka movement last year, Christian militias have led a murderous revenge campaign, which the new leadership seems powerless to stop.

It’s not surprising that French Minister of Defence Jean-Yves Le Drian announced on February 15 that the French intervention in the CAR will last “longer than expected”. But France’s interests aren’t the people of the CAR –

it’s their own commercial exploitation, and keeping China out of the picture, that they worry about. French military occupation will only make things worse.

Tensions are clearly growing between the USA and Israel, with US Secretary of State John Kerry attempting to negotiate an end to continued Israeli settlement in Occupied Palestine.

The Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has flatly rejected US proposals for even the most minor concessions. Defence Minister Moshe Yaalon described Kerry’s peace plan as “not worth the paper it was written on”.

The USA and Israel have been the closest of allies over the last 40 years, with US aid to Israel projected to reach more than \$US3 billion dollars in the coming year. This is mostly military aid, which frees the Israeli government to spend large amounts on its core supporters.

Netanyahu and his allies are determined to destroy the growing power of Iran, if necessary by direct military action. But the mess left by the 2003 invasion of Iraq has led to an Iran-friendly government in that country, which US forces must prop up to prevent a new outbreak of war. Netanyahu slammed the recent US-brokered deal for Iran to dismantle its nuclear weapons capability as “an historic mistake.”

The growing Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement (covered further on P14-15) shows that people worldwide understand the Israeli state’s real agenda – becoming a regional superpower on the backs of oppression of the Palestinians. Any interruption of support for this from the US can only be a good thing for the people of the Middle East.



Venezuela: The right wing on the streets

Leopoldo Lopez is escorted by members of the National Guard after surrendering in Caracas.

By Bronwen Beechey, Fightback (Auckland).

Venezuela has experienced a wave of protests over the past few weeks. Demonstrations against the government, largely by university students, began after the hard-line opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez called for supporters to go onto the streets and demand the exit of President Nicolas Maduro. Food shortages, corruption and crime have been frequently mentioned as reasons for dissatisfaction. While many of the protests have been peaceful, others have resulted in violent clashes with security forces, and on occasion with supporters of the government. A violent element within the opposition has been setting up street barricades, rioting and attacking property and civilians.

The Venezuelanalysis.com website reported on February 11 that in the Andean city of Merida, protestors in balaclavas were forcibly stopping vehicles at one of the main intersections,

forcing passengers off buses at gunpoint, and throwing shrapnel at motorists passing through the intersection.

Venezuelanalysis.com journalist Tamara Pearson was attacked by three protestors, who pushed her to the ground and held her at gunpoint, demanding "Give us your camera or we'll kill you". Opposition demonstrators at one barricade told Venezuelanalysis's Ewan Robertson that they were fighting a war of "attrition" against the government.

On February 22, the government announced that it was sending two army battalions to Tachira state, which borders Colombia, after reports that the state capital San Christobal had been brought to a standstill by street blockades. Press reports stated that almost no transport has been able to circulate, while the great majority of shops and businesses had closed. Authorities warned that the street blockades had blocked the delivery of food and gasoline, and claimed that transport workers had been threatened. The government suspect that "paramilitaries and criminal

gangs" were involved in the action, with the complicity of the local mayor, an opposition member.

A British traveller, Jack Johnston, told Venezuelanalysis.com that he had spent nine days in San Christobal. He said that the bus terminal had been closed and he had been lucky to get a bus out. "From Monday morning there were no taxis operating, no public transport, and the city's bus terminal was closed... on Monday one of the main squares in the city was completely deserted by nightfall, and the only thing open was a Wendy's restaurant," he said.

Asked about the authorities' response to the situation, he said: "Inexplicably non-existent. It's far from a repressive crackdown, the exact opposite. They've allowed a small number of students to occupy a main crossroads and dozens of blocks without any opposition... I explained to them [opposition activists] that there's no way this would be allowed to continue for more than one day in my country".

As of February 25, 13 people had died as a direct result of the violence, and at least 137 injured.

The government and opposition have blamed each other for the violence.

“Venezuela is victim of an attack by the extreme-right to destabilise us, to take us into civil war,” said Maduro on February 21. He also alleged that the opposition has paid youths from “criminal gangs” to participate in the violent street actions. At the same time, he warned government supporters that they must not use violence against the protestors: “I want to say clearly: someone puts on a red t-shirt with [former president Hugo] Chavez’s face and takes out a pistol to attack, isn’t a Chavista or a revolutionary. I don’t accept violent groups within the camp of Chavismo and the Bolivarian revolution,” Maduro stated at a pro-government rally on February 16.

However the opposition says the violence is being perpetrated by security forces and pro-government “paramilitaries”. “State security forces, accompanied by paramilitary groups, have cruelly attacked peaceful and defenceless protesters...leaving a lamentable tally of citizens assassinated, seriously wounded, tortured and disappeared,” claimed the opposition’s Democratic Unity Table (MUD) coalition in a statement on 21 February.

Following the expulsion of three US consular officials for allegedly conspiring with the opposition, US president Barack Obama said, “In Venezuela, rather than trying to distract from its own failings by making up false accusations against diplomats from the United States, the government ought to focus on addressing the legitimate grievances of the Venezuelan people.”

The Internet has become another battleground, with numerous posts on social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter from supporters of the opposition alleging police brutality and persecution of protestors. Even celebrities have joined in: Cher, Madonna and

Why you should get involved in Fightback

We are revolutionary socialists

We all live in a capitalist society, which means that the working-class majority experience exploitation and poverty in order to guarantee profits and luxury for the ruling-class minority. The capitalists have many weapons at their disposal – not just the army, police, courts and prisons, but a system of ideas, developed over centuries, that shape people’s beliefs about what is normal, natural, and possible. These prevailing ideas tell us that we can do no more than tinker with the

current system. However, the current economic crisis shows more clearly than ever that society must be radically reorganised if it is to serve the interests of the working-class majority. To challenge the entrenched power of the ruling class, workers cannot rely on parliament or parties like Labour, which support the existing system. We need to build a movement which can develop alternative, anti-capitalist ideas to create a revolution.

We support workers’ resistance

The fundamental basis of our politics is class struggle. For us, socialism – a society in which the means of producing wealth are owned collectively and run democratically for the benefit of everyone – can only come about when we, the people who produce the wealth, liberate ourselves from capitalist exploitation. Fightback does everything it can to support all workers’ struggles – from the smallest work stoppage to a full-on factory occupa-

tion – as these are the basic forms of resistance to capitalist rule. As workers start running their workplaces and industries on their own, they will start to ask, “Why can’t we run the whole country – and more?” We take inspiration from historical examples of workers’ control such as the Paris Commune and the Russian Revolution, and study their successes and failures.

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International

Paris Hilton being just some who have tweeted protests against the “dictator” Maduro.

Mainstream media has also joined in condemning the government. In fact, as shown by an expose by Dawg’s Blawg of fake images circulating social media portraying the Venezuelan government as repressing peaceful protesters, mainstream outlets such as CNN sometimes took such faked images for its coverage.

So what is really happening in Venezuela? The simple answer: it’s class war.

Is Venezuela worse off under Maduro?

Much of the mainstream and social media coverage of Venezuela is based on what English academic Lee Salter calls the “exceptionalism thesis” – that Venezuela is historically different from the rest of Latin America in that it was stable and democratic. In fact, a large number of Latin American scholars have pointed out that prior to Chavez, in the words of Princeton University’s Kelly Hoffman and Miguel Centeno: ‘Venezuela was marked by extreme poverty set against a narrowly constituted elite of 5-10% of the population’.

According to Julia Buxton of Bradford University, between 1975 and 1995 poverty increased dramatically, with the percentage of persons living in poverty rising from 33% to 70% during that period. The number of households in poverty increased from 15% to 45% between 1975 and 1995, by 2000 wages had dropped 40% from their 1980 levels, and by 1997 67% of Venezuelans earned less than \$2 a day. The main difference between Venezuela and other Latin American countries was that Venezuela had oil, but although the petroleum industry was nominally state-owned, the wealth from the oil went to the elite and the successive governments that ruled on their behalf. While the wealthy lived in exclusive gated communities and went on shopping trips to Miami, mil-

lions of the poor lived in shantytowns without access to electricity, water and

“ It is clear, though, that the desperate elite and its US backers will not give up and accept the democratic decisions of the majority. The challenge for the government and its supporters is to strengthen the organisations of the poor and working class, to build a movement that will defend and extend the ongoing socialist revolution in Venezuela.

other basic services.

In 1989, neo-liberal reforms introduced by President Carlos Andrés Perez caused sharp increases in costs of basic items and public transport. This led to massive rioting in the capital of Caracas and a subsequent crack-down by the military and the police, which came to be known as the Caracazo. It is estimated that state security forces ended up killing between 300 and 3,000 Venezuelans following the riots, between February 27 and March 5 of 1989. Following the Caracazo a number of progressive military officers, including Hugo Chavez, a paratrooper from

a poor working-class family, began organising to overthrow the government. An attempted coup in 1992 failed and Chavez was imprisoned.

After his release from prison in 1994, Chavez began organising a base of support among the poor. His charismatic personality and uncompromising support for social justice gained a massive following, and in 1998, he was elected president and launched the “Bolivarian revolution”, named after the 19th century independence fighter Simon Bolivar. One of his first actions was to call a Constituent Assembly in 1999, with a broad representation from all sectors of the working class and poor, to rewrite the country’s constitution. The new Constitution stressed the values of equality, independence, human rights and the ultimate sovereignty of the people.

In April 2002, Chavez was briefly ousted by a coup organised by his opponents. Following massive demonstrations by his supporters and actions by the military to defend him, he was returned to power after 2 days. In December of the same year, the state oil industry PDVSA was shut down by its management in another attempt to overthrow Chavez. Despite the economic chaos caused, the sabotage was defeated by a mass movement of the poor, oil workers and loyal soldiers. As a result, the elite managers were sacked and the industry was brought fully under control of the elected government. Chavez used the revenue to fund an ever-growing array of “social missions” which brought free health care, education, cheap food, housing and much more to the poor majority.

Since then, more laws affecting corporate interests have been passed, including laws strengthening workers’ rights, the renationalisation of strategic industries privatised by past governments, and introducing price controls.

As a result, poverty has more than halved since 2003 and extreme poverty gone from 16.6% in 1999 to 7% in 2011.

The number of doctors increased from 20 per 100,000 population in 1999 to 80 per 100,000 in 2010, or an increase of 400%, and infant mortality dropped by 49% between 1999 and 2012. Massive education programs increased the number of primary school enrolments from 6 million in 1998 to 13 million in 2011, and provided free education to at least secondary level to all adults. Illiteracy has been eliminated, hundreds of thousands of new homes built, and the minimum wage has risen by 2000% since 1998.

Of course, there are still problems – corruption and crime are often cited by the opposition. But both of these issues existed before Chavez, and have been frequently acknowledged by the PSUV. Measures taken against crime have included the setting up of a new police force, as well as the obvious measures of combatting poverty and promoting solidarity. There have been a number of cases where “Chavista” officials found to be corrupt have been sacked and jailed.

The opposition has been unable to defeat the Chavista forces at the ballot box, despite all the backing from their wealthy supporters. Chavez, and his party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) were elected again in 2006 and for a third term in 2012. Each election was conducted with international observers and declared to be fair. Former US president Jimmy Carter described Venezuela’s electoral system as “the best in the world”.

Following the death of Chavez in March 2013, vice-president Nicolas Maduro, a former bus driver and trade union leader, narrowly won the election held in April. In December, the PSUV and its allies won a convincing majority of municipal elections. Following the victory, Maduro announced the government’s political priorities for 2014, including: developing the housing mission and the community renovation program Barrio Nuevo, the improvement of public hospitals, the guarantee of drinking water supply to all homes,

and the spreading of the anti-crime Safe Homeland Plan.

In the circumstances, the government is seeking political stability. It has no interest in promoting violence; however, the opposition, having failed once again at the ballot box, does.

Who is the opposition?

The main opposition, the MUD, is a coalition of parties ranging from nominally socialist to the extreme right. Its main spokesperson, Henrique Capriles, stood as presidential candidate against Maduro in the 2013 election. Capriles represents the more moderate wing of the opposition, which has called for peaceful demonstrations against the government. However, the main forces behind the street protests are from the extreme right. They include Lopez, the leader of the extremist Popular Will party, member of parliament Maria Machado and Caracas mayor Antonio Ledezma.

Both Machado and Lopez were involved in the 2002 attempted coup, signing the Carmona Decree, which temporarily dissolved the Chávez government. López, meanwhile, orchestrated the violent clashes in front of the Presidential Palace, which led to dozens of deaths and provided the pretext for the coup. The acclaimed Irish documentary *The Revolution Will Not be Televised* shows how faked news footage was used to claim that Chavistas had fired on a peaceful demonstration, much as faked photos have been circulated on social media to portray the government as repressing opposition protestors.

While Capriles has in the past expressed willingness to work with the government, Lopez and Machado have made it clear that their aim is to force Maduro to resign. The term “salida” (exit) has been used to express the aim of the protestors – to overthrow the “illegitimate” government which has won 18 elections. The real aim of the opposition, both

“moderate” and extreme right, is to restore the privileges of the former ruling class who benefited from the old regime. What really angers them is not crime, corruption or food shortages, but the expansion of participatory democracy.

The social missions are run by communities in which they operate. The government has established grassroots communal councils that group between 200 to 400 families. These are expanding into communes which are based on elected representatives from the communal councils and make decisions over a larger area. Previously marginalised groups such as women, youth, Indigenous, Afro-Venezuelan and LGBT people have been brought into political life. And workers have been empowered to form cooperatives, play an equal role in management of nationalised industries and in some cases, to take over enterprises which have been abandoned or closed by their owners.

As Salter says, “the ‘opposition’ is as concerned with poverty as its leaders were when they presided over massive levels of poverty. They are as concerned with human rights as they were during the Caracazo Massacre. They are as concerned with democracy as they were when there was de facto exclusion of most of the population from political life. The big fear is the change in this latter. And it is this fear of the ‘plebs’ that drives the ‘opposition’.”

Lopez and other opposition figures have also been receiving funding from the US government. As Venezuelan journalist Eva Golinger explains: “Through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a congressionally created entity funded by the State Department, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Washington has channelled more than \$100 million to anti-Chavez groups in Venezuela since 2002. A majority of those substantial funds have been used to run opposition candidates’ campaigns, as well as finance those well-crafted media campaigns against the Chavez government that

International

flood the national and international press.

“In February 2011, President Barack Obama requested \$5 million for opposition groups in Venezuela in his 2012 National Budget. It marked the first time a sitting US president openly requested money in the national budget to fund Chavez’s opposition, especially during a time when domestic funding is being cut. Apparently, Obama prefers to spend US taxpayer dollars on efforts to oust the Venezuelan President – elected democratically and supported by the majority – instead of investing in the health and wellbeing of the US people.”

The opposition, and much of the mainstream reporting, has blamed shortages of some basic goods on government policies, but the government says capitalists are sabotaging the economy to destabilise the country. This has been dismissed as an excuse, or “conspiracy theory”, but there is a clear precedent.

Chile

In 1970, Chile elected a government headed by left-wing president Salvador Allende. Declassified documents later showed that then-president Richard

Nixon instructed the CIA to “make the economy scream”. The US government and Chilean capitalists conspired to manufacture shortages and sabotage the economy. The resulting economic chaos laid the groundwork for the 1973 military coup that installed the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet, which killed thousands of people and imposed extreme neoliberal policies.

A coup of the Chilean type in Venezuela does not seem likely in the short term. The army has so far remained loyal. The right-wing officers who took power in 2002 have been removed, and the government has sought to incorporate the army into the process of change.

The government has also taken measures to combat hoarding and speculation. Early in February, the Law for the Control of Fair Costs, Prices and Profits aims to prevent price speculation, product hoarding and other activities deemed to be “destabilising” the economy. It also established a maximum profit margin of 30% to prevent companies from overcharging.

It is not surprising that the latest round of right-wing violence began after these new steps in what Maduro has called an “economic revolution.”

Where is the news coming from?

The predominance of opposition views on both social and mainstream media reflect the fact that those with greatest access to social media and more likely to speak English are the middle and upper classes. They also have more contacts with mainstream media – in fact, three of the major television stations in Venezuela are owned by private companies hostile to the government. The Venezuelan state television station VTV has been targeted by opposition demonstrators who have surrounded it with blockades and attacked the building with firebombs. Three of the four major newspapers in Caracas are also privately owned and two of them, *El Nacional* and *El Universal* are strongly anti-government.

It is also important to note that the students involved in the protests make up a small minority of Venezuelan students. As commentator Jorge Martin points out, “There are 2.6 million university students in Venezuela, a massive increase from less than 800,000 in 1998, as a direct result of the social programs of the Bolivarian revolution. Only a small minority of students have been involved in protesting, mainly from private and “old” state universities, which tend to be elitist. None of the new Bolivarian Universities have been involved in protests and there are a number of student organisations in the traditional institutions which openly



Pro government forces mobilize in Caracas

reject the opposition campaign.”

Thousands march in support of the government

Large marches in support of the government have generally been ignored by mainstream media. On February 18, thousands of oil workers, with other workers and the poor, marched through Caracas to oppose the right-wing protests and defend the elected government. At another large “march for peace” in Caracas on February 22, Maduro repeated his call for dialogue between the government and opposition, calling for a “National Peace Conference” to resolve the ongoing violence. He also said that he was prepared to talk to the US government, who he has accused of supporting the protests.

However Maduro also told supporters that, “If due to the circumstances of fascist violence [the opposition] take power, I authorise you to go onto the

streets and defend the nation, to rescue every millimetre of the homeland”.

At a pro-opposition rally on the same day, Capriles presented a list of “demands” to be resolved before dialogue could begin. They included the release of Lopez and all “students and youth” arrested during the protests. At the same time, Capriles was critical of the violent protests, saying that they “make it easy for the government”. “What do you achieve closing yourselves in within your own street? It’s in the government’s interest that the protests are in Altamira [a wealthy area of Caracas] and not Catia [a working class area of Caracas]”.

Capriles’ remarks, as well as showing the divisions in the opposition itself, reflect the reality that the protests are not supported by the working class and poor. In a recent poll undertaken by a private consultancy firm with a sample of 1,400,

only 29% of Venezuelans feel that the government should be forced from office through street actions. Meanwhile 29% feel a recall referendum on Maduro’s presidency should be organised in 2016, and 42% feel that Maduro should be allowed to serve out his full mandate uninterrupted, until 2019.

It is clear, though, that the desperate elite and its US backers will not give up and accept the democratic decisions of the majority. The challenge for the government and its supporters is to strengthen the organisations of the poor and working class, to build a movement that will defend and extend the ongoing socialist revolution in Venezuela. For supporters of the Bolivarian revolution in countries like NZ, the best response is to counter the lies and distortions of the right-wing, and be prepared to organise in solidarity against any attempts by the US to interfere in Venezuela’s affairs.

Join the 2014 solidarity tour to Venezuela

Tour dates: December 2 - 13, 2014

Registrations are now open for the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network’s 2014 solidarity tour to revolutionary Venezuela. Participants from all countries are welcome to apply to join the tour.

The solidarity tour - to run from Tuesday December 2 to Saturday December 13 (inclusive) - will be a unique opportunity to observe first-hand, learn about and be inspired by a grassroots movement that is transforming not only Venezuela, but all of Latin America, and is challenging the greed and destructiveness of global capitalism by showing that a better world is possible.

Since 1998, Venezuela’s Bolivarian revolution has achieved remarkable things by putting control of the nation’s politics and economy back into the hands of the poor majority. Despite the

challenges created by the United States-backed opposition’s campaign to stall and destroy the revolution, this people-powered process of change continues to flourish.

The 2014 study tour is the 15th international delegation to Venezuela organised by the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network. The detailed itinerary will be planned over coming months, but the 12-day tour will include visits to social missions, communal councils and communes, as well as production co-operatives, agro-ecology projects, public health and education services, community controlled media, and women’s and Indigenous organisations and projects.

A report on last December’s AVSN tour is available on the website (<http://www.venezuelasolidarity.org>).

The 2014 delegation will meet with a wide range of grassroots organisations, community activists and government representatives to learn more about the

participatory democracy and “socialism of the 21st century” being created by the Venezuelan people.

Accommodation and transport within Venezuela, and English-Spanish translation throughout the brigade, will be organised for all participants by the AVSN. Participants will need to book their own international flights to and from Venezuela.

In addition to your international airfare, you will need to budget for approximately \$1200. This will cover your brigade registration fee (\$500 for waged workers or \$350 for students/pensioners), and your food, transport and accommodation for the 12 days in Venezuela.

The registration deadline is October 3, 2014.

For a registration form or more information, please email: info@venezuela-solidarity.org.

Palestine

There's Pride in resistance, not in apartheid

After the disruption of Israeli pinkwashing (P15) at Pride 2014, GayNZ asked activists involved to submit an article. This contribution comes from Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (Aotearoa), an online network including members of Fightback.

We are Arabs, Jews, Maori, Pakeha, Asians. We are queer. We value the work that LGBTI activists before us have done to improve the lives of queers in Aotearoa and the world over. We value Pride for creating a queer-positive space where our community can come together and celebrate who we are.

But we are not proud that queer struggles are hijacked by the state of Israel in order to 'pinkwash' its colonial violence towards Palestinians. We were not proud to see the Embassy of Israel included in Auckland Pride. This is why we had to take a stand, to protect queer spaces from being complicit in Israeli apartheid.

For many, our protest came as a surprise. The Israeli embassy, however, had anticipated the presence of protesters. In a press release just days before the event, the embassy was clear that their participation in Pride was motivated, not by a desire to support LGBTI rights, but as a PR exercise in response to Wellington protests against an Israeli Embassy-sponsored dance show.

The cynical use of queer rights as a publicity strategy to create a positive, humane image for Israel is not new, nor is it exclusive to New Zealand. In 2011 the Jewish lesbian writer Sarah Schulman published an op-ed in the New York Times criticising Israel's 'strategy to conceal the continuing violations of Palestinians' human rights behind an image of modernity signified by Israeli gay life'. Other prominent queer Jews have echoed Schulman's criticism of pinkwashing, including Judith Butler and Aeyal Gross.

The pinkwashing narrative presents a

familiar racist trope: Arab societies are conservative, gender normative and homophobic. Israel is the only Middle-Eastern country where gays have equal rights. Queer Palestinians escaping persecution in their own communities relocate to Israel for asylum.

A 2008 report on gay Palestinian asylum seekers in Israel, published by Tel Aviv University's Public Interest Law Pro-

“ Our queer politics are rooted in the principle of ‘no one left behind’. We do not accept the advancement of gay men at the expense of lesbians, or of cis queers at the expense of trans people. We also cannot accept the advancement of any queers at the expense of Palestinians.

gram, presents a very different picture. The report found that gay Palestinians who escape to Israel live in the country illegally—since Palestinians are barred from applying for refugee status in Israel. This means that they are in constant danger of being deported back to communities where they will be subject to homophobic violence. Israeli security services have been known to exploit this vulnerability, and blackmail Palestinian gays into becoming informants.

Even for Jewish-Israelis, the country is

not a queer-loving utopia. Two months ago a trans woman was viciously attacked on the streets of Tel Aviv. A gang of 11 men assaulted her with pepper spray and tasers. Israeli police were quick to dismiss the attack as a 'prank' and denied that it was motivated by transmisogyny. Her attackers, it turns out, were off-duty officers in Israel's Border Police.

It's not surprising that the same young men who spends weekdays shooting and tear-gassing Palestinians also spend their weekends assaulting trans women. This is the intersection of militarism and homophobia in which Palestinian and Israeli queers exist.

Palestinian queer organisations like al-Qaws, Aswat and Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions have called on the global queer community to support their struggle against both Israeli apartheid and queerphobia. That call has been answered around the world, by groups like Queers Against Israeli Apartheid in Canada, No Pride in Israeli Apartheid in the UK, and Black Laundry in Israel.

It's out of a desire to support Palestinian queers, and in the tradition of intersectional queer politics, that we decided to take a public stand against the Israeli Embassy's float at Auckland Pride. We know that some of our fellow queers think that Pride is not the appropriate time or place to make a political statement about Middle East politics. The argument that we shouldn't mix pride parades with global politics sounds an awful lot like the 1980s argument that anti-apartheid protesters shouldn't mix rugby with politics. We were not the ones who chose to use Pride as a platform for discussing Israel. The Israeli Embassy are the ones who decided to hijack a gay pride event and exploit it to uphold a progressive image of a state that subjects its Indigenous inhabitants to apartheid.

Our queer politics are rooted in the principle of 'no one left behind'. We do not accept the advancement of gay men at the expense of lesbians, or of cis queers at the expense of trans people. We also cannot accept the advancement of any queers at the expense of Palestinians.

We recognise the link between colonisation of Palestine, and colonisation of Oceania and Aotearoa. Tagata Pasi-

fika and tangata whenua gender and sexual diversity were violently displaced through the colonisation of this region. We celebrate the first ever Pasifika LGBT Youth float at Pride 2014. The hijacking of Pride to promote apartheid detracts from this celebration of diversity and solidarity. Auckland & Wellington: Actions against Israeli apartheid
In solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, Fightback

(Aotearoa/NZ) endorses the Palestinian-led call for Boycotts, Divestments and Sanctions (BDS) on Israel.

Cultural boycotts are a part of BDS. These boycotts target cultural products & activities designed to promote Israel, and supported by Israeli institutions.

On the 22nd of February 2014, two actions in different cities in Aotearoa/NZ promoted the cultural boycott of Israel.

Wellington: Don't dance with Israeli apartheid!

In the capital, Aotearoa BDS Network challenged a performance by Israeli dance troupe Batsheva (touring an event entitled Deca Dance as part of the NZ Festival). Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs describes Batsheva as "perhaps the best known global ambassador of Israeli culture," and their performance in Aotearoa/NZ was sponsored by the Israeli embassy.

After letters to the NZ Festival and the Minister of Foreign Affairs curiously failed to produce results, Palestine solidarity activists organised an action outside the performance.

Chants of "Boycott Israel/Boycott Batsheva," "Shame" and "Free Palestine" accompanied banners and placards including "Queers against Israeli apartheid" and "Jews for a free Palestine." Demonstrators also handed out informational leaflets and discouraged patrons from attending.

Zionists mobilised a counter-demonstration to support Batsheva. This counter-demonstration appeared to be mainly stacked with evangelical Christians from out of town, although notable Wellington Zionists including David Zwartz were also in attendance. Counter-demonstrators affirmed the message of Aotearoa BDS Network, that supporting Batsheva means supporting Israel. In 1981, the peak of the Aotearoa/NZ movement to "halt all racist tours" from apartheid South Africa,

supporters of the Springbok tour called to separate sports from politics (impossible, as politics always shape sports). By contrast in 2014, evangelicals supporting Batsheva wielded placards declaring Israel "the only democracy in the Middle East."

The combination of Christian Zionists on one side of the entrance, and Palestine solidarity activists opposite, certainly worked to disrupt the event.

On Facebook, a staff member at the venue commented:

"This is beyond stupid, they actually ended up obstructing the performance they're trying to support, we had to send patrons down the disgusting fire escapes so they could leave the building."

Fifteen patrons decided to forego their tickets, to applause from demonstrators. The Aotearoa BDS Network will maintain the pressure discouraging NZ Festival, and other organisations, from supporting Israeli apartheid in future.

Auckland: Queers Against Israeli Apartheid

While protesters and counterprotesters clashed at the Batsheva Dance recital in Wellington, Israeli pinkwashers¹ tried to pull a fast one at the Auckland Pride Parade on Ponsonby Road.

1. "pinkwashing" means using an image of gay and lesbian rights to conceal abuses, such as the ongoing brutality of the Israeli occupation

The night before the parade, the Israeli embassy put out a bizarre, gloating press release announcing that they would have a float in the parade, "whilst BDS Campaigners have fled in their minivan to Wellington".

This is all part of the "Brand Israel" campaign, aiming to portray Israel as a progressive, diverse Western democracy – and Palestinians and other Arabs as backwards, homophobic savages.

Thankfully, Queers against Israeli Apartheid weren't going to let them get away with it. When the Israeli "float" – actually four men on a car with rainbow and Star of David flags – drove up Ponsonby Road, about 10 peaceful activists disrupted the parade to block them.

The activists unfurled banners and placards saying "No Rainbow Big Enough to Cover the Shame of Israeli Apartheid" and "Pride in Resistance, Not in Oppression".

One Israeli participant ended up yelling at a protestor "You should go and live in Tel Aviv, it's the gay capital of the Middle East". The protestor she was yelling at was of Palestinian origin herself – the people who were cleared out of what is now the State of Israel in al-Nakba (the Catastrophe) of 1948.

After a few minutes, police and security dragged the protesters out of the way and let the Israeli float proceed. But hopefully this made enough of an impression that next year's Pride organisers will think twice before letting "pinkwashers" use our parade for their propaganda.

Film review: The Hunger Games— Catching Fire

By Wei Sun (*Fightback*, Christchurch)

The second movie of *The Hunger Games* trilogy—*Catching Fire*, based on Suzanne Collins' dystopian novels, officially started at the cinemas in November 2013. As a sequel to the first movie *The Hunger Games*, the story of Katniss Everdeen and the post-apocalyptic nation of Panem continues; and as in the previous movie, the kids from 12 districts selected by Capitol are being sent to the wild to fight against each other to death.

Catching Fire should possibly cause more concern to the far-right US commentators, after they targeted venom at a few 'Marxist' films such as *The Muppets*, *The Lorax* and *The Hunger Games* (<http://fightback.org.nz/?s=the+hunger+games>). At the end of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss temporarily loses her consciousness due to the massive explosion destroying the arena. Therefore, the 75th Hunger Games is forced to end earlier than it is originally planned by Capitol. When she wakes up, her sorrow turns into anger and determination in no time.

One major difference between the first and second movie is that in *Catching Fire*, the main characters—Katniss and Peeta from District Twelve—are getting more rebellious rather than being scared

and depressed. The desire to end the oppression of Capitol keeps growing stronger throughout the movie. Katniss chooses to fight back against Capitol in the end, which is completely different to the first movie where she and Peeta attempted suicide to prevent Capitol from having only one victor for the 74th Hunger Games.

Very similar to our society, people are being divided into 'districts' that are forced to fight against each other to survive. A tyrannical dictatorship rules, and also ensures to enforce the brutal Hunger Games annually to make submissions to the state. *The Hunger Games* also act to distract the working-class from the daily grinding struggle.

Class politics is a major factor of *The Hunger Games* trilogy. While the ruling class in Capitol are enjoying all the luxuries, the poor and powerless class are being watched for the rich-class's entertainment, struggling from poverty and having to fight completely unwillingly against one another to survive with the constant high risk of losing their lives.

Donald Sutherland, who plays the head of state President Snow, has said that he only plays this role to inspire young people to start a revolution and fight back, because the rich class need the

annual Hunger Games to continue to make the state complete. And because class society is very fragile; the poor who are fighting back against the upper class nearly destroy Capitol in the end, indicating that the rebellion continues without doubt in the last movie *Mockingjay*.

Like the way capitalism oppresses the working-class in real life, Katniss is forced to wear a wedding dress. However, the white wedding dress burns and becomes a black dress with wings like a mockingjay when Katniss is asked to stand up and turn around to show all the audience her 'magic trick'. Would this be a symbol that the revolution is about to start? According to the third book of the trilogy, the strength of the working-class is much bigger than what Capitol expects, and the fragile system of the state definitely fails eventually.

The movement based on the strength of the working-class clearly does not only exist in fictional worlds. The larger the upper-class gets, the smaller we get, and the easier the upper-class will oppress us. It is necessary for us to learn the theme of *The Hunger Games*—solidarity of the oppressed class to fight against the exploiters.



The Internet Party: A progressive force?

By Byron Clark, *Fightback* (Christchurch).

The Internet Party is going to fundamentally change this country's political landscape, apparently. It's unusual for a party that has not registered with the electoral commission, and who haven't hasn't announced any concrete policy or candidates, to be viewed in such high regard by the media. Yet we are seeing comments like "something fantastic is brewing for Aotearoa/NZ and I for one am watching happily as it unfolds," from Derek Handley in the *National Business Review*, the publication that for one reason or another has given the party the most coverage. "Kim Dotcom will unleash the force of innovation and the internet in the electoral and democratic process," claims Handley, though what exactly he means by that is unclear.

The vague policy points that the Internet Party have so far around issues of surveillance and high speed internet are not exactly new and exciting. "The emergence of the Internet Party is somewhat frustrating for the Greens," writes former Green MP and intelligence spokesperson Keith Locke on *The Daily Blog*, "given that pretty much all of the Internet Party's policies (such as internet freedom, defending privacy and withdrawing from the Five Eyes) are already Green policy."

Locke seems to agree, though, that the new party will be significant, stating

that "the Internet Party and the Greens, together, will be able to push [these issues] more strongly in the election," and that "the Internet Party helps legitimise Green policies," implying the policies of parliament's third largest party need to be legitimised by what could turn out to be nothing more than the latest plaything from the mind of an eccentric millionaire.

Maybe it's not the policy that is exciting, but how that policy comes to be. For Vikram Kumar, the former CEO of Kim Dotcom's *Mega.co.nz* service who resigned to become general secretary of the new party, "the process of making the Internet Party's policies, in an inclusive and engaging manner, is as important as the policies themselves." Presumably Kumar envisions an Internet based system for determining policy. Again this isn't particularly new, democratic parties have always use some mechanism to create policy, there is nothing fundamentally different if such a system uses the most up to date communication technology.

The German Pirate Party, with whom the Internet Party has been compared (though 'Pirate' is probably a word they are keen to avoid given Dotcom's circumstances) and have several MPs, use an online system called 'Liquidfeedback' to shape policy, but the system doesn't yield anything particularly profound. "The ridiculous truth about the Pirates," German Green MP Volker Beck told

an interviewer in 2012, "is that they take our proposals from parliament and put in in their Liquidfeedback to discuss... they are taking up our content and [proposing it] as their own"

Liquidfeedback does even less good when the Party is voting on issues of little concern to its membership, when members don't bother using it. The magazine *Der Spiegel* described it as "a grassroots democracy where no one is showing up to participate".

"The Internet and technology are tools and ways of thinking," writes Kumar. He is only half right. Somewhat confusingly he states that "Technologists know... that technical solutions to essentially political or business problems don't work," but also "it is up to us, whether by design or plodding along, to build a future for Aotearoa/NZ we want. I believe the Internet Party can catalyse discussions about both the design itself as well as the need for a design in the first place. It's not only what the State does but how."

If by "design" he means reshaping the democratic process with a Liquidfeedback type system the future will likely be dead on arrival.

A left-wing option?

With policies mostly in common with The Green Party, the Internet Party appears to be a left-wing option. The in-

National politics

volvement of blogger Martin Bradbury and former Scoop.co.nz editor Alistair Thompson lend credence to that idea. Kim Dotcom however is a capitalist by any definition. He is anti-establishment in that he represents a new media group of capitalists who are going up against states who have taken the side of the old media elite.

When manufacturing based industries began to decline in the USA and intellectual property based industry (such as film, music and software) became a substantial part of the American economy, laws were written to favour copyright holders and protect intellectual property. Among other changes, copyright terms were extended and copyright violation was turned into a criminal offence rather than a civil matter.

While Aotearoa/NZ may seem a long way from the US, that didn't stop Dotcom's mansion being raided by armed police due to alleged copyright violation, something that should seem ridiculous. In fact, leaked US embassy cables from the trove released by Chelsea Manning show that a great deal of lobbying went into an effort for local intellectual property laws to reflect those of the USA.

The lobbying efforts for US-friendly copyright and intellectual property law continue through the negotiations of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPPA), with John Key's trip to Hollywood, and intellectual property negotiators from the US Trade Representative's Office visiting Wellington.

Dotcom can take a populist anti-TPPA position that is no way in conflict with his business interests, such as when he told *Russia Today* two days before the announcement of the Internet Party, "What Hollywood is trying to do is basically to turn the internet into a totally censored and controlled network to their liking, and that's what I'm fighting against."

He's not alone, of course. No doubt Amazon.com would like to see copyright reform that let them create thou-

sands of new ebooks that could be sold cheaply but profitably, without paying royalties to the authors, and Google would love to stream every possible movie and TV show on Youtube (with their own advertising of course).

But while the founders of Google and the CEO of Amazon.com are among the 85 people who together own more wealth than half the planet's population, Kim Dotcom is a relatively small player, allowing him to keep his folk-hero status even at a time when the wealthy are increasingly disliked and distrusted.

Kumar wrote in his NBR piece that, "the things that New Zealanders typically care about when voting can all benefit significantly from the Internet and technology. This includes the economy, jobs, health, education, and inequalities." He doesn't elaborate on how 'the internet' or 'technology' will solve inequality, in fact he goes on to say that "technological innovation not only perpetuates but amplifies societal divides."

If not left, then what?

Some have been quick to label the party as 'libertarian', a political philosophy advocating only minimal state intervention in the lives of citizens. Certainly the announced policies of the Internet Party would not be out of place in a libertarian manifesto. Pure libertarianism with its talk of dismantling the welfare state and abolishing the minimum wage has never been popular in Aotearoa/NZ for obvious reasons (as we go to press the electoral commission has just de-registered the Libertarianz Party, most likely meaning they now have less than 500 members).

The Internet Party is unlikely to veer to that extreme, and more than likely it will want public money to fund the broadband internet infrastructure required for the high-tech future they appear to envision, as well as expecting the state to pick up the tab for the education required to create 'internet-economy' IT professionals, in line with

how things are done in actually-existing capitalism.

The question must be asked though, with all the talk of innovation and entrepreneurship; quickly moving on from the brief mention of inequality Kumar praises "technologists" Rob Fyfe of Air NZ and Sir Ralph Norris of ASB Bank. Kumar then asks readers to "consider the simple yet immensely powerful call from the late Professor Sir Paul Callaghan for Aotearoa/NZ to be a country where talent wants to live." How would Internet Party MP's vote on issues such as raising the business and high income tax rates to fund social programmes? Or bringing about protections for casual workers?

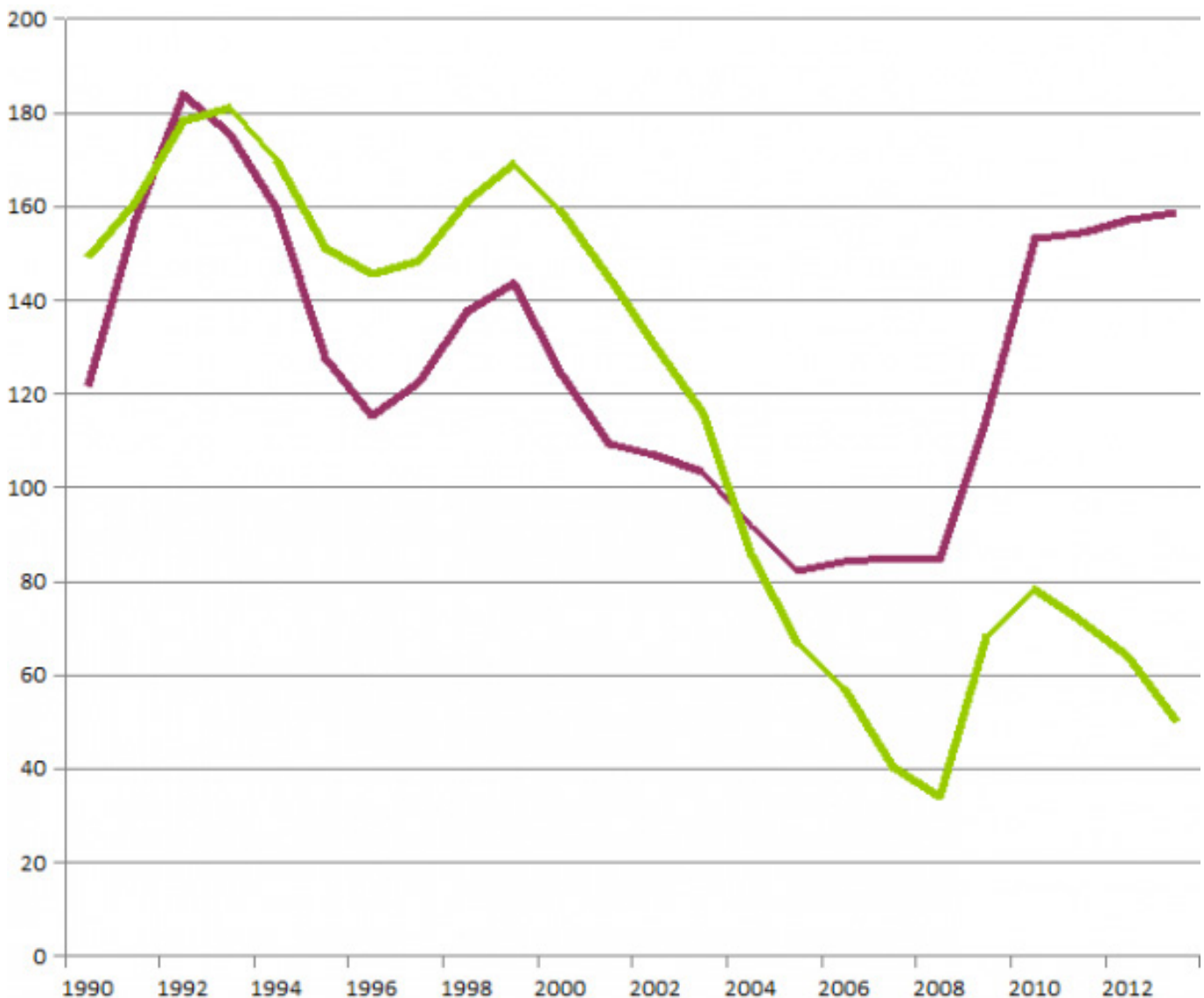
But will they get anywhere?

Despite the hype, there has been no obvious groundswell of support for the Internet Party. While the press release for the first Roy Morgan poll conducted since the party was announced noted their existence, they failed to make a showing in the actual poll. Perhaps when the party registers with the electoral commission, announces some candidates and policy and begins a campaign funded out of Kim Dotcom's deep pockets they will improve their polling, but it's hard to say for certain.

Much of the media optimism about the Internet Party has spoken of their potential to bring members of generation Y who didn't vote in 2011 to the polls. This view is somewhat condescending. Members of this generation have concerns greater than their internet speed - student debt, insecure work and the falling prospect of home ownership, just to name a few examples. While digital populism may motivate some young voters, the Internet Party does not represent the alternative needed to address these concerns.

While progressives may share some common ground with the Internet Party, there is no sign yet that it represents a progressive force.

Billions of dollars stolen from the unemployed



By Mike Treen, Unite Union General Secretary. (Reprinted from the Daily Blog.)

The combined efforts of both National and Labour governments' punitive policies towards the unemployed seems to have removed over 100,000 people from rightful access to an unemployment benefit.

Until the mid-2000s there was a broad correlation between the number officially counted as unemployed through the Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) and the number getting an unemployment benefit at the same time

even though they were being measured in different ways. In fact, the number on benefits exceeded the number as recorded by the HLFS by an average of about 30,000 in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The economic recovery that had set in by that time saw both numbers drop significantly.

However, around the mid-2000s the Labour government introduced a severe case management regime that seemed designed to prevent people accessing their entitlements rather than encouraging them to. The numbers on the unemployment benefit began to fall dramatically faster than the HLFS

unemployment number until the gap hit 50,000 in 2008.

The international crisis and recession of 2008-10 sent the HLFS unemployment numbers soaring but the new National government's even more punitive regime managed to keep the numbers on a benefit from increasing anywhere near as fast. The number of those on average receiving a benefit compared to the number of unemployed in the household survey is now about 130,000 fewer than it was in the late 1990s.

The missing 130,000 are the reason why so many social agencies are being inundated for help for food, clothing, and

Unemployment/History

shelter despite the so-called recovery in the economy over the last year.

There was also no significant increase in other working age benefits like sickness, invalid or sole parent benefit to account for the missing number of those receiving the unemployment benefit.

To make matters worse the HLFS is actually a very narrow measure of unemployment. To be counted you have to be physically able and ready for work, not be enrolled in an education course, and to have actively sought work in the last 4 weeks other than looking in a newspaper. You are also disqualified if you have worked one hour in the survey week – even if unpaid in your family dairy.

The broader measure of “jobless” which is also collected in the HLFS is actually a more useful figure. This number includes those actively seeking work but unable to start immediately, those

available and only seeking work through newspaper advertisements or not actively seeking work for some other reason, and those discouraged from looking for work at all.

Using this number we find that those on benefits as a percentage of the broader jobless category went from around 70% in the late 1990s to less than 20% today. There is no scientific explanation for this to happen except for the policies of the government making it happen. But there is a price that is paid – and it is one of human misery on a wide scale.

These numbers need to be given a human face. The unemployed are not just numbers. They are working people trying to survive in an unjust capitalist system that is happy to use us when the capitalists need us but want to discard us when they don't and not even provide the minimal emergency support we are legally entitled to.

The demonising of the unemployed as bludgers is a lie and has always been a lie. Welfare fraud is minuscule compared to tax fraud by the rich but prosecuted much more vigorously. There has been a massive denial of entitlements to the unemployed over the last decade that is probably worth billions of dollars. The tax cuts for the rich have been paid for by denying entitlements to the poorest and most vulnerable is theft from working people of about a billion dollars a year. It is time to get angry.

NB: The numbers used in this article compare the number of unemployed, jobless and beneficiaries are taken from the Department of Statistics available on their Infoshare website. I use annual figures for the June year to remove seasonal or other factors. The one figure not available was the 2013 number for beneficiaries which I have done an estimate for.

The Sin of Cheapness: Harriet Morison and the Tailoresses' Union

By Ciaran Doolin, Fightback (Wellington).

Early migrants to Aotearoa/NZ had high hopes. From the slums of the East End to the peasant villages of Guangdong province, they carried with them a shared vision of a fresh society, one where the injustices of the “Old World” would be no more than painful memories. However the discontinuity between their dreams and the reality of colonial life was marked.

The moneyed class in early Aotearoa/NZ had a different future in mind. They were intent on replicating the modes of production prevalent in the industrialised world, while avoiding the reaction from below – the “evils” of Chartism and other progressive working-class movements.

While male workers in early Aotearoa/NZ were forced to endure the vagaries

of a barely regulated labour market, with only the flimsy shield of a balkanised union movement to protect them, women faced an oppression that was manifold. Not only were they paid considerably less than men for the same work, they were also expected to spend their “non-working” time tending the home and raising children. They were denied political representation, and the trade union movement made painfully slow progress in organising unions for female workers.

However, in the late 1880s there was a paradigm shift: the first all-female union, the Tailoresses' Union, was formed, and working women found a champion in Harriet Morison.

In 1879 the Aotearoa/NZ economy spiralled into a deep depression. There was widespread unemployment, a substantial fall in the general rate of wages, and child and female labour proliferated.

Fierce competition drove employers to cut every corner, and the union movement, fragmented and consistently on the defensive, could do little to protect the most vulnerable workers – or at least that was what many thought. In January 1885 a Trades and Labour Congress was held in Dunedin to discuss the general problem of labour throughout the country. Hitherto no mention had been made of organising female workers, but at the conference a prominent unionist read a paper on female labour, which concluded:

“It has been generally conceded that female labour is far more at the mercy of unscrupulous employers than that of males in consequence of their want of organisation and forming themselves into trade unions, and, though the females of this colony are much indebted to Mr J. B. Bradshaw, M.H.R., for getting the Factory Act passed, there



Statue of Harriet Morison alongside other suffragettes

is much to be done yet in the way of protecting females by getting them to form into trade unions, upon the basis of the Victorian Tailoresses' Union, so that they could become a power for good in the colony and assist in future legislation for the advancement of their own and the children's welfare."

The sentiments were echoed by C. J. Thorn, the President of the Congress. Despite the aspirational tone of the conference, little immediate action was taken.

However, through the courage and persistence of a small group of men and women, the scales of industrial power began to turn. In late 1888 the practice of "sweating" was exposed in Dunedin. The Reverend Rutherford Waddell, concerned with the social problems in his parish, discovered large numbers of women working excessively long hours for a pittance in cramped quarters. He delivered a sermon on "The Sin of Cheapness" which was widely read after it was reported in the *Otago Daily Times*. In January 1889 a capable reporter with the *Times* made investigations into the practice. In a series of articles he made further revelations largely confirming Waddell's impressions. The associated agitation led to a Royal Commission in

1889.

The Commission found that in almost every trade child labour was rife and underpaid female work common. It was in the tailoring trade, where "sweating" was most prevalent. Male tailors, who were earning £3/10/- a week in 1874, were now unable to get £1/15/-. In comparison, girls worked excessive hours to earn just 10/- to 12/- a week. Frequently girl apprentices worked for 12 months for no salary and then had to make their way as volunteers. Conversely, middle men were found to be taking upwards of 30% on shirts. In one case, fourteen young girls were found busy hand-sewing in a room 21x11x8 feet - less than a quarter of the space considered adequate. Lunch rooms were not provided and men and women had to eat their lunch on the streets. To avoid inspectors a number of girls often worked on the roof.

At the end of January 1889 Waddell published a letter in the *Otago Daily Times* calling for the establishment of a Board of Arbitration and a Working Women's Association. In early February, he convened a meeting of concerned citizens to decide what was to be done, and a Committee was set up. The Committee resolved to submit to the large

employers a minimum price list. The price list was approved unanimously by the manufacturers, but the warehousemen (who played a key role in the supply chain) rejected it and it could not be enforced. The Committee then advised that the only practical solution was to form a union, and a motion was brought to that effect, which passed without opposition.

Thus the ground was laid for the formation of the Tailoresses' Union. The significance of the new union was two-fold. It was at once contending both with the forces of capital and the prejudices, shared across the classes, that women were simply incapable (or not worthy) of successful combination. By early July the Committee had everything it needed to launch the union. John Millar, leader of the Seamen's Union and later the Maritime Council, was elected the first secretary, Waddell the president, and Harriet Morison the co-vice president, and 564 initial members were registered. The Committee, which had up to this point been handling basic negotiations with employers on behalf of the tailoresses, handed the management over to the women of the union.

Having effectively held the position of Secretary (the most important position

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in the union) through 1889, Morison immediately took over the role when Millar relinquished it in 1890. Born in Ireland in 1862, Morison immigrated to Aotearoa/NZ with her family in 1874. Taking tailoring as her trade she began a lifelong career as an advocate for working-class women. Under her leadership the union established reading and luncheon rooms and a benefit fund for sick workers. The net result of the union's organising was wage increases between 12.5% and 50%, a considerable reduction in work hours and the abolition of home-work. The Dunedin union grew to 900 members and, within 12 months of its formation, branches were established in Wellington, Auckland and Christchurch with memberships of 450, 422 and 700 respectively.

In May 1890, the Dunedin union assisted other workers on strike. Levying 6d per week for female workers and 1/- for male workers, the union pledged £20 weekly to the Auckland tailoresses and £5 weekly to the Petone millworkers. The union gave strong support to the Maritime Strike which began in August 1890, with grants of £50 and £25 made to the strike fund. In 1890, the Otago Trades and Labour Council was re-established and the Dunedin Tailoresses' Union was one of the leaders of the process.

Morison travelled throughout the country assisting other branches. In late 1891, she was sent to Auckland, where she spent seven months trying to revive the Auckland branch. On arrival she found the union on the verge of collapse and the workers being coerced and sweated. She was influential in a re-enactment of the same process of agitation – public meetings, newspaper investigations etc – that had occurred in Dunedin. By the end of her visit Morison had managed to lift the minimum wage to 7/6 per week, and, after the failure of conciliation proceedings, sent a petition to the government calling for the introduction of compulsory arbitration legislation. One historian has argued that it was the

difficulties faced by the Auckland union that persuaded William Pember Reeves, the Minister of Labour in the reformist Liberal government, to include the compulsory clause in the historic Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1894.

Morison was involved in many other issues concerning women beyond the industrial struggle. She led an unsuccessful attempt to set up a convalescent home for Dunedin clothing workers, and sat on a local committee to manage ambulance classes for women. She edited the "Working Woman's Corner" in the *Globe* newspaper from January to March 1891. Morison was also a committed suffragist and Christian. She was a founding member of the Women's Franchise League in Dunedin, the first in Aotearoa/NZ, which she formed with Helen Nicol in 1892, and a member of the suffragist Aotearoa/NZ Women's Christian Temperance Union. Morison, alongside rank-and-file union members, circulated suffrage petitions. The strength of local unions influenced the number of signatures collected in the three national petitions. Dunedin, in particular, consistently did well; Nicol reported that two-thirds of those signing were working women. In Auckland in 1891, 397 women signed. The local union was revived, thanks to Morison's organising, before the next petition in 1892, and it was signed by 2,479 Aucklanders. Morison and the union were influential in a public campaign which helped prevent anti-suffragist H. S. Fish, member of the House of Representatives, from winning the 1892 mayoral election in Dunedin.

Despite her outstanding talent as an organiser, Morison did not competently manage the union's finances, and in 1896 she was forced out of the union due to an accusation, probably false, of embezzlement. She continued her advocacy for working women outside the union as an inspector of factories for the South Island from April 1906. However, so many complaints were laid by factory

managers that Morison was removed from her position, and in May 1908 she was placed in charge of a newly opened Women's Branch in Auckland, which was essentially a labour bureau for domestic servants. After years of difficulty with senior figures in the Labour Department, in 1921 Morison finally resigned from the public service when the Department of Labour closed the Women's Branches and made her and three other women redundant. Harriet Morison died on 19 August 1925 at her home in New Lynn. She had never married. The union she worked so tirelessly to build outlived her by 20 years.

Morison and the Tailoresses' Union shattered long-held assumptions about the role of women in 19th century society. Not only were women in industry capable of combining, but they were able to do so with a high degree of success. In the context of a depression, wage increases of up to 50% were unheard of, especially for workers in such a weak industrial position. While many male unionists were denouncing the phenomena of class-conscious "New Unionism" that was sweeping the Western world in the 1890s, the tailoresses were providing substantial support during the great Maritime Strike of 1890 and to unions involved in day-to-day struggles in other industries. Moreover, the Tailoresses' Union was able to integrate a political arm – namely suffrage – into their organisation without diminishing the efficacy of its industrial functions, a harmony which few unions had yet been able to attain. Their leader, Harriet Morison, epitomised the steep change that was occurring in Aotearoa/NZ society, a shift that would define the course of the country's history in the coming century. As a woman she stood for the right of her gender to be represented politically and to self-organise industrially, and as a trade unionist she stood for the liberation of the labouring classes from exploitation.

Mainstream racism and white power groups

By Ian Anderson, with contributions by Joel Cosgrove (*Fightback Wellington*).

“When fascism comes to America,
it will not be in brown and black
shirts. It will not be with jackboots.
It will be Nike sneakers and smiley
shirts.”

—George Carlin, comedian

On Waitangi Day 2014, the NZ Herald ran a “protest-free” edition, proudly announcing this editorial decision with an image of a raised fist.

The Facebook page Wake Up NZ (with around 10,000 likes) reported the fist as a “white power” symbol, associated with far-right groups including Right Wing Resistance and the National Front. UK leftist tabloid the Morning Star echoed this assertion, in an article reprinted by popular Australian paper Green Left Weekly.

Some responded that the raised fist is a broader symbol, also used by black power and leftist groups. Socialist Aotearoa is probably the most known group in Aotearoa/NZ to use the fist as their main logo, albeit in yellow. It’s entirely possible that the editors of the Herald intended that the fist symbolise dreaded ‘protest,’ by indigenous and radical forces.

Whatever their intention, the message was racist. By filtering out militant anti-colonisation politics, the Herald editorial team endorsed a colonial vision of Waitangi Day. In fact, editorial choices made by the Herald in part reflect the difference between liberal racism and the straight-up fascism of white power groups.

The National Front denies that Maori are the tangata whenua, the indigenous people of Aotearoa/NZ, instead relying on pseudo-history to argue that Celts came first. By contrast, the Herald coverage accepted a kind of tokenised, ceremonial Maori indigeneity.

Instead of protest action, the Herald’s Waitangi Day photo gallery depicted the militarist dawn service on Waitangi grounds, a celebration of the Pakeha treaty – the treaty that guarantees Crown ownership, not the legitimate (dishonoured) treaty which guarantees absolute chieftanship to tangata whenua. Ultimately, the NZ Herald does more to advance white power than some bonehead¹ with a swastika.

While groups like National Front and Right Wing Resistance insist on ‘white pride’ and ‘white power,’ using separatist language, mainstream politicians and opinion-makers largely insist on ‘one law for all’ and ‘one nation,’ hiding the domination of one nation by another (see Grant Brookes, Waitangi Day, Te Ra o Waitangi – What does it mean today?). This capitalist domination is legitimised by a layer of corporate iwi leaders (see Annette Sykes, The Politics of the Brown Table).

In light of this liberal racism, fascist and white power groups can appear as a relic, a reminder of politics that were supposedly defeated last century. In Spain and Germany, the 20th century growth of fascism was initially supported or tolerated by much of the international ruling class, particularly because fascists were willing to get their hands dirty killing communists. Nowadays in Aotearoa/NZ, white power groups are considered unfashionable in polite company.

In some ways this historical irrelevance is an illusion; fascism may be unfashionable when liberal democracy is serving capitalism just fine, but when the ruling class are threatened by the spectre of communism, the liberal mask comes off.

In Europe in the 21st century, since the global financial crisis, fascist groups have grown. In the UK, the British National Party (BNP) made a bid for

respectability, winning seats in elections, while the English Defence League (EDL) remains an organisation of street-thugs. Greece’s Golden Dawn openly assaults migrants, leftists and queers, with backing from much of the police. In a situation of economic and ideological crisis, the battle between the far-right and the left can play a major determining role.

However, the situation is different in Aotearoa/NZ. Although we have experienced a decades-long growth in inequality, this country was relatively sheltered from the shock of the global financial crisis. There is also no substantial left or radical workers’ movement to defeat (something Fightback, and other groups, aim to change). There is no sign that white power groups are growing substantially here, in part because the ruling class currently has no need to support their growth.

This is not to say we should tolerate white power groups. In Otago/Christchurch, Right Wing Resistance (headed by Kyle Chapman, former head of the National Front) have a tangible presence in the community, leafleting houses and intimidating people of colour. In 2012, their annual White Pride Worldwide rally attracted a reported 90 people, marching unchallenged. In this context, it is absolutely necessary to confront fascists in the streets and stop them marching; in 2013, counter-protestors easily outnumbered the White Pride Worldwide rally. Anti-fascist rallies resonate widely in Christchurch precisely because Right Wing Resistance has a tangible presence.

It’s also necessary to clarify that fascism is unwelcome in progressive spaces. In 2013, media revealed that a youth who vandalised Jewish gravestones in a Tamaki Makarau/Auckland cemetery had previously marched with Occupy Auckland, bearing a skateboard marked with swastikas. In Occupy Wellington, the

1. Bonehead’ refers to white power skinheads; not all skinheads are fascists.

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(successful) struggle to get consensus on banning the National Front initiated a more general debate over ensuring that Occupy was an anti-oppressive space. For any kind of progressive politics to flourish, intolerance of white power groups must be an agreed bottom line.

However, confronting white power groups can become a ritual for the left, disconnected from wider reality.

From 2003-2008, the National Front attempted to march on the cenotaph in Poneke/Wellington, annually on Labour weekend. Each year progressives resisted this march.

The largest mobilisation was in 2004, after attacks on Jewish gravestones (and NF support for a church led anti-gay march). Hundreds of counter-protesters mobilised and chased the NF out of parliament grounds, led by a large contingent of 'anarcho-fairies', dressed in pink tutus, chasing the scattered NF remnants back to the railway station. From then on the annual mobilisations became much more formulaic and predictable, with a slowly dwindling number of counter-protesters, and an organised police presence keeping the NF apart from the counter-protestors.

In 2009, the following comment was posted by 'anonymous' on indymedia.org.nz:

"[Counter-demonstrations against the National Front have] become nothing more than an annual ritual... I would very much doubt if many of the Anti-Fa crew would travel to say the Hutt Valley and protest outside the Hutt Park Motor Camp and do something useful and put pressure on the owners of the Motor Camp not to take bookings from these guys.

The time has come to re-evaluate the way we react to the Nationalist Flag Day protest and come up with fresh ideas rather than another pointless protest with more embarrassing arrests."

In the end, the Hutt Valley Motor Camp cancelled the NF booking, forcing them to find other accommodation. However, with the annual confrontations fizzling out, there was no reassessment of anti-fascist strategy and tactics. As futurist Alvin Toffler is often quoted as saying, "if you don't have a strategy, you become part of someone else's."

For Pakeha, anti-fascism can work to alleviate guilt. On the Facebook event for the Christchurch Rally Against Racism 2014, suggested chants include "Adolf Hitler was a d**k, fascist bigots make me sick." The cathartic ritual of confronting an unpopular group of boneheads can underline how deviant, how marginal white power groups currently are. However, racism is embedded throughout our society.

Our 'justice' system is a case in point. Maori make up about 14% of the general population, and 50% of the prison population. Tagata Pasifika are also overrepresented in prisons. Criminalisation is not simply a matter of oppressed groups perpetrating more offences; Maori and Pasifika are more likely to be targeted for drug offences than Pakeha. Although Europeans make up the majority of overstayers, Tagata Pasifika are also more likely to be targeted for overstaying.

This is not a country run by Kyle Chapman's mob. Aotearoa/NZ is a country run by (mainly) Pakeha who overwhelmingly support marriage equality, who work with the Maori Party and selected iwi leaders, who say they value the content of a man's character (read, bank account) over the colour of his skin. The racism that keeps capitalism running here is a liberal racism, repulsed both by swastikas and Black Power patches.

In *The People's History of the United States*, Howard Zinn notes that early in the colonisation of North America, the capitalist state deliberately drew the 'colour line' to undermine working-class solidarity. In Aotearoa/NZ, Maori workers were the first to take strike

action, in the Bay of Islands 1821, demanding to be paid 'for their labour in Money, as was the case in England, or else in Gun Powder.' In keeping with the racist pseudo-science of the day, Maori were portrayed as genetically inferior to Europeans.

By demonising tangata whenua – the most dispossessed, militant workers – capitalists undermine working-class unity. Bigoted Pakeha, most obviously those in Right Wing Resistance, play into this divide-and-conquer strategy. By clinging to meagre privileges, racist Pakeha workers prolong the system that exploits them. Racism is ultimately a structural matter, not just a matter of prejudice.

White power groups cannot be tolerated. However, confronting mainstream racism is also a necessary project. This project demands that we amplify voices ignored by the NZ Herald (one reason liberation movements need our own media). This project demands that we actively support and participate in struggles for self-determination, including the MANA Movement. This project demands that we weave our struggles together, recognise that all forms of liberation rely on each other. Liberation demands that we recognise, in the words of Civil Rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer, that "nobody's free until everybody's free."